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SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ELA AND DRL/NESCA
NSC FOR KUMAR

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: STATE SECURITY'S SELECTIVE INTERFERENCE WITH CIVIL
SOCIETY

REF: A. CAIRO 1493
[1](#)B. CAIRO 1467
[1](#)C. CAIRO 1393
[1](#)D. CAIRO 839
[1](#)E. 06 CAIRO 6132

Classified By: Economic-Political Minister-Counselor
Donald A. Blome for reason 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. KEY POINTS

- (C) Recent discussions with NGO contacts illustrate some of the factors which shape Interior Ministry State Security Investigative Services' (SSIS) decisions to interfere with certain civil society activities.
- (C) State Security seems to target certain NGO leaders based on personal animus, while it allows other, sometimes more controversial NGO activities to proceed.
- (C) In mid-July, State Security cancelled an NGO-organized conference in Cairo that was to feature Muslim Brotherhood parliamentary leader Saad Katatni, although it allowed Katatni to participate in a summer 2008 conference run by the same NGO.
- (C) State Security's interference with civil society appears to be more pronounced outside Cairo, especially in Upper Egypt.

MOI State Security

[1](#)2. (C) The Interior Ministry uses its intelligence unit, State Security Investigative Services, to monitor, harass and sometimes infiltrate civil society and the political opposition. SSIS is an elite unit that reports to the Deputy Interior Minister. It suppresses opposition, civil society and even some religious activities through arrests, harassment and intimidation. SSIS also performs a supervisory role for other MOI security bodies, including the regular police which deals with common criminal activity, and the Central Security Forces, responsible for crowd and riot control, and responding to demonstrations.

SSIS Harassment: The Personal Factor

[1](#)3. (C) SSIS seems to target certain civil society activists, while it gives freer rein to others whose work is equally sensitive, if not more so. For example, Afro-Egyptian Human Rights Organization Director Engi Haddad has consistently complained to us of SSIS interference, and told us August 2 that the harassment had increased markedly since July when

she began negotiations to buy the independent sensationalist daily "Al-Badeel." While Haddad is interested in sensitive issues such as corruption, much of her public work currently focuses on the relatively innocuous topic of civic education for children. Haddad told us that she felt compelled to distribute invitations for her July civic education conference in Cairo only a few days before the date, out of fear that SSIS would shut it down with more lead time.

¶4. (C) In contrast, SSIS gives a wide berth to other activists who publicly confront some of the most controversial issues. United Group Director Negad Al-Borai organized a late June USAID-funded conference on corruption at the prominent Cairo Marriott, which was covered by local television. At the conference, Al-Borai charged the public tender process with delivering public funds into the pockets of "tycoons," and a former minister criticized the GOE for allowing foreign investors to profit from Egyptian factories while Egyptians are left with "pollution and lung disease." Both the former minister and a human rights lawyer called the public tender process "a corrupt farce."

¶5. (C) Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR) President Hisham Kassem told us August 4 that SSIS has only called him twice in the past few years, and not since early ¶2009. It is noteworthy that even after EOHR's public criticism of the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MOSS) in May when MOSS sent a letter noting it could dissolve the group for receiving foreign funds without authorization (ref D), SSIS did not respond to Kassem. He has also told us that SSIS has not resisted his current efforts to establish a new, independent newspaper. It is not entirely clear why SSIS

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targets Haddad while other activists pursue more public, sensitive activities without interference. Al-Borai is reputed to have established a collegial relationship with SSIS (ref E). Haddad characterized the harassment as personal and insulting, "a form of mental terrorism." She is one of the only activists with roots in the NDP, where she worked for Gamal Mubarak until 2004, and perhaps GOE resentment of her change of allegiance factors into SSIS' actions.

Decreased SSIS Tolerance for NGO Work with the MB

¶6. (C) One example of SSIS cancelling an NGO conference because of the planned participation of a Muslim Brotherhood (MB) leader is consistent with the GOE's ongoing pressure on the MB (ref B). Maged Sorour, Executive Director of the One World Foundation for Development and Civil Society, told us August 3 that SSIS had cancelled at the last minute his organization's Cairo conference on evaluating parliament because of the scheduled participation of Saad Katatni, leader of the MB bloc in parliament (ref A). Surour told us that during the summer of 2008 he organized a Cairo conference on the future of Islamic movements in Arab parliaments, which Katatni attended. He said that SSIS made no attempt to cancel that conference.

¶7. (C) Surour told us of his consequent surprise when SSIS began calling him in early July 2009 to ask why he had invited Katatni to his upcoming conference. Surour said that on the morning of the planned conference, he received a call from the downtown Cairo hotel that was to host the gathering. The hotel told him it had cancelled the conference because of "ceiling leaks." Surour described his anger at having to call scores of speakers and guests, many of them parliamentarians, to tell them of the cancellation.

A Tighter Grip Outside Cairo

¶8. (C) Emad Abdel Wahab of the Justice and Citizenship Center in Minya (about 150 miles south of Cairo) told us August 4 that SSIS will not allow him to register his NGO with the Ministry of Social Solidarity because of his membership in the opposition Al-Ghad party and his previous election monitoring work with the Ibn Khaldoun Center. He said SSIS allows him to pursue his work, which focuses on legal aid for victims of police torture, promoting sectarian harmony, and women's rights. However, he noted that SSIS draws the line at any overtly political public activities such as demonstrations or rallies. Abdel Wahab said that SSIS has permitted him to hold small conferences. He told us that at a recent conference on Islam in public life, which he organized with the Ibn Khaldoun Center, SSIS allowed about 80 people to attend, and planted agents in the audience.

¶9. (C) SSIS has sometimes inserted itself into our meetings with NGOs outside Cairo, particularly in Upper Egypt. During our mid-July visit to the Delta city of Mansoura (100 miles north of Cairo), we learned that SSIS compelled one Mansoura NGO leader to stop his human rights work, which Cairo activists routinely practice (ref C). SSIS did not overtly interfere with our Mansoura NGO meetings, but at the offices of one NGO, which is participating in a USAID-funded NGO coalition to combat torture, plain clothes SSIS officers monitored our arrival and departure.
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